

HISTORY of Homeless Education

In 1977 Congress passed the Stewart B McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. This legislation came about because of lawsuits won by individuals who were denied access to school enrollment because they had no address. They were homeless and were denied the same educational services as other children and youth. This passage of the law created a program that had states designate a Education of Homeless Children and Youth Coordinator for the purpose of counting homeless children and youth, determine what barriers kept kids from entering and completing school, writing a State Plan to address those barriers, and be an advocate for homeless students. In this passage there was no grant money for school programs.

The hardest part of the program initially was to count homeless kids. They were hard to count because they did not always appear to be without a home. The school age youth who is on their own often lives with a friend and yes even in abandoned cars or buildings.

The 1977 Law was reauthorized in 1994 with additional program requirements but best of all with dollars to provide sub grants to schools. One of the new requirements was for a district with a grant to have a designated Liaison in that district to be aware of the homeless issue so parents and kids had an advocate to go to in time of need. The second most important program requirement was related to the need to collaborate on program services to homeless kids. This helped create a stronger network of services for the student and their family. The most prominent of these collaborations was with the Title I program. Homeless children and youth automatically qualified under Title I guidelines. The combination of these two as well as the collaboration of other programs allowed the small amounts for sub-grants to be enhanced to provide more comprehensive services to homeless kids.

Since 1994 Homeless students have benefited from grant programs in Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Helena, Hellgate Elementary, Target Range Elementary and Missoula. As of this grant year (2007-2008) programs are active in Billings, Helena, Hellgate Elementary, Target Range Elementary and Missoula. These programs all have their own unique design, serve the same kinds of kids but in different ways. These programs have all had their successes in educating homeless children and youth and the failure of loosing a student to the transient nature of the family.

In November 2001 Congress passed and in January 2002 the President signed the “McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001”. The law may be found in The Reauthorized ESEA, Title X, Part C, Subtitle B – Education of Homeless Children and Youth. This reauthorization made extensive changes to the law that guides the State and local school districts. Please refer to the "Top 100 Homeless Questions and Answers".

